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Interview and Discussion with Sir Malcolm Rifkind

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Summary:

Discussion with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former Defense Secretary and Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, about the 1990s and the new relationship that formed after the Cold War.

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Visions of Europe - Sir Malcolm Rifkind

Dr. Sergey Radchenko: Welcome, everyone. Today we have another in a series of our oral history webcasts. With us today we have Malcolm, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who was Defense Secretary and Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom. He was Defense Secretary from 1992 to 1995, and that was followed by tenure as Foreign Secretary from 1995 to 1997. This project is a part of the Wilson Center series called Visions of Europe that documents the transformation of Europe in the 1990s. And joining us today for this discussion are my colleagues Helen Parr, who is Professor of Contemporary and Modern History at Keele University, and Jerry Hughes, who is a reader in military history at Aberystwyth University. My name is Sergey Radchenko, and I am Professor of International Relations at Cardiff University. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. And with this, I would like to give the floor over to Helen.

Dr. Helen Parr (HP): So, Malcolm, you became Defense Secretary on the 10th of April 1992. Could you start by taking us back to the mood of that period: The Berlin Wall had fallen, Cold War was over, Germany had reunified, and the Soviet Union had collapsed. Could you express how that looked from your perspective in Britain and what you thought the implications were going to be?

Sir Malcolm Rifkind: Well, thank you very much. Let me try and respond. I mean, in my own case, of course, I was partly influenced by the fact that some years earlier, between 1982 and 1986, I'd been a Minister of State in the Foreign Office dealing with our relations, under the Foreign Secretary, dealing with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. And I was also involved in the visit of Mr. Gorbachev to Margaret Thatcher during that period of time, so I, as it were, I had been a very junior participant in those extraordinary months when Margaret Thatcher managed to establish her relationship with Gorbachev, which, in some respects directly, in other respects indirectly, led not only to the Gorbachev-Reagan relationship, but the peaceful end of the Cold War. So, when I came back as Defense Secretary in the cabinet in 1992, I had obviously been witnessing, not as a participant, but as an observer, when I was doing other government roles, what had happened in between. And it really was the realization of something we never believed, certainly, would happen in that timescale, and there was no certainty it would ever happen. It was not just that the Cold War was over, but that it had ended peacefully, which was by no means predictable given that the Cold War could have been a hot war at any stage during the fifty years that preceded it. But in addition to that, you had the emergence, throughout Central and Eastern Europe, of new democracies, countries that were not only now free of the Soviet control, but had opted for the values and for the system of government, for the rule of law, that we in the West had always adhered to. And that itself seemed to be an enormous step in the right direction. And of course, it wasn't just limited to what was happening in Eastern Europe and in what was now the Russian Federation. One had seen as an indirect consequence of the end of the Cold War, an extraordinary period from 1989 onwards, when democratic systems of government when the rule of law as a reality not just as a facade, as well as market economics as opposed to a highly centralized socialist-style economic system, really had caught the imagination of other parts of the world as well. So, one saw in the Far East, one saw in Latin America, one saw in parts of Africa, the emergence of either substantial or certainly significant areas of political reform. And it looked as if, to coin a notorious phrase, it was the "end of history". And somehow, the democratic system had prevailed and was now the global system: even Russia, however slowly, appeared to be moving, or trying to move, in that direction.

Of course, it gave... one of the consequences also was there was a huge desire on the part of the newly liberated countries in Eastern and Central Europe to quickly become part of the West through membership of NATO, through membership of the European Union, and in other ways, and I can perhaps best symbolize - but it's an actual event -

to what was felt at the time. When I was Defense Secretary, one of the first visits I did was to the Baltic states, who had very recently all become, not for the first time, but again, independent, genuinely independent countries, and were all desiring to become not just independent, but firmly part of Western and Central Europe. And so, I spent a day in each of the three republics - small countries, and I was only visiting the political leadership. But I remember vividly the conversation I had with the then-president of Latvia in Riga, and this is in 1992-'93, I can't remember the precise date, but pretty early in my term, and he was saying, you know, "The West is not giving us as quick and as easy and as straightforward a response to our aspirations to join NATO, to join the European Community, as it then was, and can this not be accelerated, can this not be brought up to the picture of our own aspirations and desires? We will do whatever we can do." And I was not hostile to what he was saying, far from it. But I said, "Look, you know, can we just get this into some historical perspective, Mr. President? If, ten years ago, or even five years ago, anyone had predicted that today, the Minister of Defense of the United Kingdom would be having discussions with the president of an independent Latvia as to when they might join NATO, we would have all been seen as more suitable for medical treatment than serious political analysis.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Could I just sort of briefly intervene on this on this last point? Did you think, though, at the time, that it was even remotely possible for the Baltic states to actually become a part of NATO?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yes, I thought it was possible. It's a good question you ask, Sergey, because what we had already come to terms with, and in some cases, and it varied from person to person and from government to government; in some cases enthusiastically, in some cases as a practical necessity, the absorption of Poland and of Czechoslovakia, or Czech Republic, I should say, and Slovakia, Hungary and so forth, into NATO was now in the process of happening. It hadn't actually happened, but it was in the process of happening, it was going to be inevitable. Where there was a question mark was about the Baltic states, and it wasn't any absence of a desire to be friendly. It was more a realization, and something I personally felt strongly about, that you should not accept as a member of the alliance, which is a military alliance, not simply a political friendship organization - Article Five involves treaty commitments - and therefore you should not accept as a member state, and the commitment to come to the military defense if necessary, in any circumstance where you did not feel you could deliver that result, where it just would not happen in practice.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Was there a fear, though, that, for example, you know, the Baltic states being so close to Russia, if there was a conflict there, that Britain would be entrapped as a part of NATO, as a member state, and would have to defend Estonia, for example, against the Russian- was that a fear or concern?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Let me answer your question by saying: there was a spectrum of situations, if you look at all the newly independent democratic countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At one end of that spectrum was Poland, Czech Republic, and so forth. And that not only was a very powerful ethical and political argument, it was also a strategic argument. These were very much Central European countries. They could be part of the NATO territory, once it included the former GDR and Poland, and Hungary and the Czech Republic, the capability of NATO to provide effective defense if there ever was, at some unknown future date, a recurrence of what would be Russian aggression was not too difficult to contemplate. It was not militarily, any- in fact, it was a lot easier than it would have been during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union would have started in the heart of Europe, in the middle of Germany. So that was not a military problem, you could undertake these obligations. And of course, Berlin itself was a relatively significant military force. It had a significant military contribution to make.

Now, when it came to the Baltic states, it wasn't so much the politics, it was, can we

really undertake to defend these territories that are not only far closer to Russia, in fact, share a common border in Russia, with the case of Latvia and Estonia, but also because of the Kaliningrad enclave and the other geographical aspects of that region would create real practical issues. So, it took a bit longer- and then, sorry, I'm not mentioning what was an additional consideration. We knew it was perfectly obvious that although the Russians were not enthusiastic about any expansion of NATO for Berlin, for Hungary or the others, these are not countries that have never been part of the Soviet Union. When it came to part of the Soviet Union, that was a qualitative step. And of course, it didn't just include the Baltic states. There was already speculation about Ukraine, and Georgia, and countries of that kind. So, I think to my conclusion that for- not just my conclusion, I think the conclusion of most NATO countries - was a gradual acceptance that the Baltic states were different from Ukraine or Georgia. Obviously, geographically different, that they were that much closer to Central Europe, but also historically different in that they had] all been independent republics up till Stalin's invasion, annexation, of them in the 1940s. And therefore, the extent to which there was an- that was something we had never recognized. We had never recognized the legitimacy of their absorption into the Soviet Union. Indeed, their diplomats in London continued to have diplomatic status right up to the end of the Cold War, there was one or two who had survived. One of them actually became, I think, Latvia's first post-communist ambassador in the United Kingdom, and he had an uninterrupted presence in London throughout all those years. So, the degree of sense of obligation to the Baltics was historically significant and different with regard- in comparison, for example, to Ukraine or Georgia, as well as the practical issues.

DR. HELEN PARR: So, what implications did you think that all of this momentous change had for Britain's role? So, the government held two quite farsighted seminars at Chequers in 1994 and again early in 1995, the purpose of which was to sort of thoroughly discuss Britain's foreign defense policy in the light of these global changes. And, of course, a lot of the discussion focused on Britain's relationship with America and Britain's relationship with the Western European countries. And there seemed to be a fear that Britain might be eclipsed by a burgeoning relationship between America and Germany, by German and French resurgence on the continent. How did you see the future of Britain's relations with America and with the closest European partners?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, there was never any doubt, not just in the case of United Kingdom, but of all European countries, that once the reunification of Germany took place, Germany, which even as West Germany had been a very powerful economic country, but as a united country would be certainly the dominant economy in Europe. And normally - the case of Germany wasn't quite the same - normally from economic power flows political and military power, as we're seeing with China at this very moment. Now, for various reasons, as you'll be familiar with, the Germans themselves did not see it in that way. But there was no doubting that Germany would nevertheless be hugely more important as a political force. And that was something which had already, in a sense, been addressed. Under Margaret Thatcher, of course, the United Kingdom had had a particular objection to German unification. She strongly believed that this was undesirable, partly for the very reasons that you've mentioned as to what a united Germany would lead to, but she not only didn't have the support of other governments, particularly the United States, but she didn't have the support of her own colleagues. She herself had had a seminar, it's well known, it's well recorded, during her term, with a group of academics who, to her disappointment, I think, - none of them actually supported her central thesis that somehow this either could be or should be delayed. And even President Mitterrand, she had hoped, as President of France, would understand the geopolitics of it. He did understand the geopolitics, but he also understood perhaps better than she did, at first, what was practically possible, and he had concluded that German - correctly - that German reunification was utterly inevitable, and that it was best to see it as an asset, not as a liability, which ultimately Thatcher came to the same view, but with only quite a long intervening period.

So far as the Chequers seminars that I personally attended as Defense Secretary, although I was Defense Secretary, not Foreign Secretary, at that time, I tried to make a contribution on the geopolitical aspects as well. And it seemed to me that one of the main unresolved issues was how, particularly if NATO was going to be enlarged, what were the consequences for NATO and British and American policy towards Russia? How could Russia be reconciled to the enlargement of NATO? Russia ideally would have liked to see NATO dissolved after the end of the Cold War as the Warsaw Pact and been dissolved, and that was not going to happen. I think the Russians realized that, particularly under Yeltsin. That was not a big issue, as it became under Putin in later years. But there was still this question of: could Russia itself have some relationship with NATO? In my own view, I was more sympathetic to the issue than the number of my colleagues, but I had no doubts in my own mind that Russia could never become a full member of NATO without destroying the whole purpose of NATO. Because NATO was not just a political alliance, it's a military alliance with an integrated military structure. And, also, you could not give Russia a veto as to whether NATO could act or not act in particular circumstances. So, I raised just the possibility - it wasn't a formal recommendation. But I raised the possibility of whether we might be able to contemplate a particular status of associate membership, which would not give Russia a veto in NATO's councils but would be nevertheless a mark of understanding that Russia was a country with a legitimate interest in overall European security. And although that did not happen, that particular proposal, I think, in some ways, the NATO-Russia Council, which was formed, and which existed until the annexation of Crimea, was an attempt, not a very impressive attempt, but was nevertheless an attempt to accommodate that dimension that I also been trying to offer a view on.

DR. HELEN PARR: If I may follow up, did you see Britain's role in terms of, perhaps, pushing for deeper European integration to mitigate against some of these risks, or to act as a bridge or a link between Western Europe and the United States, or to push for a closer Special Relationship? How did you see it?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, when you say a deeper integration, do you mean with what was then the European Community? Or do you mean integration of a different kind, are you using the word in different context?

DR. HELEN PARR: Well, at the time, obviously, it had just become a European Union and was thinking about advancing towards- I was thinking about political integration, actually.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: In Europe, you mean?

DR. HELEN PARR: Yes.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yeah. Right. No, no, I was not a Euroskeptic in the sense of being hostile to the European Union, as it was becoming. But I had no interest and no enthusiasm for political integration if that meant the progressive federalization of Europe. I know that was not on the formal agenda. But it was highly relevant to the debate that was already happening about the single currency proposal and whether the United Kingdom should be part of a single currency. And although I was not a sort of Euroskeptic as that term is normally defined, I was very strongly opposed to us joining the Euro because I could not see then, and I do not see now, how you could ever have a functioning and successful long term single currency without that leading to not only banking union, but fiscal union, and once you have fiscal union, then you go to the very guts of what the nation-state is all about. We had a civil war in England about whether the King or Parliament should have the power to tax. The United States declared its independence from the United Kingdom, from the British Empire, on the basis of "no taxation without representation." And these were not coincidences. Tax is fundamental. Who raises the money that people are forced to

pay to the government? Is that done nationally, or is it done internationally? That is the difference between independence and a federal or unitary state. So, I took the view then, as did many other people, but my own personal position was that while I wanted Britain to remain in the European Union, and issues like the internal market was something we could certainly go along with, you could not go along with any kind of integration, which only made sense if it was intended, or even if it was unintended, but inevitably it would lead to some form of federal or confederal European political entity. And therefore, if you don't want to get to the destination, you shouldn't get on board that particular train.

Dr. Gerald Hughes: You mentioned the Chequers seminar of 1990. And I think, whether you'll agree with me or not, that the problem with that seminar was the way the questions were framed in the invitation by Charles Powell, and the way that he framed the communique at the end of the seminar, which was subsequently leaked to *The Independent* on Sunday. Now, the seminars that you attended in '94- '95, if I'm right, the question was raised, I think, by Douglas Hurd, essentially: What was Britain's foreign policy for? So, what did you think it was for? Because I remember, at the time, I was studying for a master's degree, and I noted the speech that you gave Chatham House, just about the time you became Foreign Secretary, where you quoted Palmerston's famous dictum. I mean, what signal you're trying to give with that? You do say something about it in your memoirs.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Sure.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: But it was the kind of thing that would have been leapt upon, I would have thought, by the Blairites at the time as indicating a kind of outdated, non-multilateral view of the world.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, I certainly knew that quoting Palmerston would be either interpreted as *folie de grandeur* or it was rather like Boris Johnson modeling himself on Winston Churchill, and that could invite that kind of response. I was conscious of that, but I had, in fact, changed some of the pictures in the Secretary of State's room at the Foreign Office when I became Foreign Secretary to include a portrait of Palmerston, because I've always thought that he was, with all his manifest faults, and given that he was operating at a time when Britain was a world power that it certainly isn't now, he was a remarkably impressive statesman.

But the particular point that I would make in answer to your question is this: One of the most famous quotes of Palmerston's, it's well known, is that the United Kingdom has no permanent friends or permanent enemies, but it does have permanent interests. And, building on that, what I said in that speech and what I said on a number of occasions during that period, because it was very relevant to the question of whether we should join the Euro or not, was to say that when- if you have to choose between your interests or your influence, your interest should always prevail as a country- not just Britain, that should apply to most countries. So often we were being told that if the United Kingdom did not do X, or did not do Y, or did not do Z, it would lose a great deal of influence. And that is a perfectly legitimate point to draw to people's attention, that you don't want to lose influence. Part of foreign policy success is influencing other countries [in relation] to the objectives that you have identified. And, therefore, if you either don't have influence, or if you consciously reduce that influence, that doesn't normally sound like a very sensible thing to do.

So I had no problem with that as a general principle, but, to me, there was a fundamental exception to that, and one that was not being properly recognized: that sometimes, the only way you could protect your national interests was if you accepted that there might be or would be a loss of influence with your allies or with other countries, but that the price you would pay by that loss of influence would nevertheless be significantly less in terms of your national interest than something

that went directly to the heart of those interests. And I used as an example General de Gaulle's views on NATO. As is well known, when he came to power, he almost presided over France's departure from NATO. Because he said, in his view, and I'm not commenting on the merits of what he said, I'm simply using it as an example. He said: there is no way an independent France can continue to accept integrated military structure with American leadership of armed forces in peacetime. Not possible. And if NATO means that we have to, then we can't be in NATO. And France came very close to leaving NATO at that stage. But the United States and the United Kingdom and other- Germany and other countries thought: this is absurd. We cannot possibly allow France to leave NATO. In a real crisis with the Soviet Union, France would be on our side, and we must continue to have it within the alliance. And therefore, we said: Okay, we will no longer insist that membership of NATO requires involvement, participation in the integrated military structure. And France then left the IMS and indeed did not join it again until Sarkozy was president of France many years later. Now, there is no doubt during that period when it was not in the IMS and did not attend any of the major meetings when NATO was discussing military matters, and NATO was, after all, a military alliance, there's not the slightest doubt that France lost a great deal of influence during that period. But if - and it's for the French to decide, not for me to decide - if de Gaulle's view was correct, that France's interests would be dramatically damaged by a loss of independence that he judged was consequent on being part of the IMS, then he was entirely logical and acting in France's interest to say, "Our interests are more important than some loss of influence, and if we have to lose influence in that area, too bad, that's a price we have to pay." And I was, to conclude this rather long response, my own view was that that's exactly the argument that was relevant in regard to whether Britain should join the Euro or not. Yes, we, by not joining the Euro, by opting out, we lost influence, or we didn't have any increase in influence of a kind we might have had as part of the single currency. But if the only way we could retain that influence was by the severe loss of national independence, not just one-off, but on a basis that would then increasingly be demanded of us as the EU moved, or tried to move, towards banking union, fiscal union, and issues of that kind, that was a price we had to pay. So that was my thinking. And that, I think, was also a legitimate consideration to apply.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Absolutely fascinating to hear that. I was also reading the Chequers transcript, and one thing that struck me there was that feeling that Britain still had not yet found a role, in the sense, I was, as I was reading those transcripts, I was thinking of that Dean Acheson statement, remember? It was in, I think it was in 1962, yeah? The famous assertion about Britain having lost an empire but not having found a role. And you read those Chequers materials from the 1990s, to which you refer, and there's the sense that Britain was still looking for a role. Do you think it ever found the role?

DR. GERALD HUGHES: What Harold Macmillan said in his diaries the day after that speech was: "Major furore about a speech by Acheson. Of course, Acheson was always a conceited ass."

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, that is an understandable point of view of Macmillan's. I think my own response would be that, in one sense, Acheson correctly identified part of the debate in the United Kingdom, because for 150 years, we had been a great imperial power, and therefore there was no need to have a debate when a quarter of the world was shaded pink on the map, and when India was part of the Empire, and Canada, Australia, and South Africa looked to the United Kingdom for leadership, and the United States recognized, right up till the Second World War, the particular power, it wasn't just status, it was the power that flowed from that. So, in that sense, it was legitimate to say, no comparable role had been found. But I think that Acheson's remarks were nevertheless offbeaten, because they didn't recognize, actually, how extraordinarily successful the process of ending Empire had been. India, Africa, the West Indies, the other states and countries and territories. Not only did the.... Not all, not in every single case - but the vast majority of them acquired their independence peacefully, partly thanks to Harold Macmillan, "Wind of Change" and everything that

he presided over during his term, but so successful were we, relatively speaking, that we still have the Commonwealth, with the Queen accepted as the head of the Commonwealth, with the Prince of Wales recognized as being, when he becomes King, the next head of the Commonwealth. Now, if you compare that with the decolonization experiences or the end of empire of most other European countries, we've got a lot to be relieved about. France had the agony of Algeria, had the agony of Dien Bien Phu and Vietnam. The Belgians had the humiliation of Congo and all that happened there. And obviously, in the case of Spain and Portugal... Portuguese had the wars in Angola and Mozambique, and so forth. So, the end of empire actually happened without any extraordinary trauma in United Kingdom. And while people are often accused in this country of being nostalgic, or older people are, not so much younger people, people who remember the Empire, well, it's not so much nostalgia - it's not anybody thinking, you know, "If only we could get back to that." It's more of a realization that we are now a middle-sized power. We're not insignificant or irrelevant. Given we only have a population of 65 million, to be, what is it, the seventh or eighth largest economy in the world, it won't stay that way, we'll gradually get ninth or 12th or 15th or 20th. But in a world that has 200 countries in it, or members of the UN, that shows you the UK doesn't need to feel insignificant. Nor should it.

DR. HELEN PARR: If we could turn now to a slightly different question, and one which must have absorbed a lot of your attention while you were Defense Secretary, which of course is the war in Bosnia.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yeah.

DR. HELEN PARR: Could you take us back again to the to the thinking at the time and explain why Britain responded in Bosnia in the way that it did? You were talking earlier about interests and influence and objectives. What were Britain's objectives in Bosnia?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Right. Let me just first begin by saying how Bosnian policy essentially was determined in the United Kingdom. And I think I'm not exaggerating in saying it was essentially a triumvirate of the Prime Minister, John Major, Douglas Hurd as Foreign Secretary, and myself as Defense Secretary. And actually in that order, as well, in terms of the degree of influence or power in contributing towards policy, but all three of us were very much involved. And actually, all three of us had more or less the same view on the nature on the conflict, and how not just Britain, but also the international community should respond to it.

And let me just make another preliminary remark before I go to the heart of your question. And that is to say that the pressure we were under in the United Kingdom was rarely, if ever, [to become more involved than we eventually became. Most of the criticism we were getting at various stages was that we'd gone too far. We had started a process which would drag us into that war in a way that virtually no one in Britain wanted. So, for example, our main critics within the Cabinet were, as I recollect, Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke, both of whom felt that our decision to send British troops under- wearing blue helmets as part of a United Nations humanitarian force, but nevertheless, the very fact that these were British troops, armed British troops - they certainly had armored vehicles, they had military equipment, primarily to defend themselves, but also it could have been used in other circumstances. So, most of the internal debate and criticism at first was that we were going too far. Very few saying we weren't getting involved enough. I vaguely recollect John Gummer, who was Agriculture Minister, but he would have been more sympathetic. And Margaret Thatcher, outside government, occasionally was very critical of the government's policy. So that's a bit of the domestic political background.

I think the issue that most needed to be addressed by not just ourselves, but by the Americans, and by others, and different people came to different views, was: what

kind of war was this? And, to put it simply, my view, and that of I think, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, was that it was primarily- it was really a form of civil war, although Bosnia was now an independent state, as was Croatia, as was Serbia. You couldn't simply say this was an international conflict as had been other wars in Europe and elsewhere over the century. This was a war that had broken out because of the collapse of Yugoslavia, which had been a single state since the 1920s. And when it collapsed, some of it happened peacefully. One thinks, for example, in particular, of Slovenia, and perhaps Croatia to some significant degree. But then you had the- ultimately, what was always going to be the most difficult task was Bosnia-Herzegovina. And it was the most difficult because Bosnia had never been an independent state. Unlike some of the others, it had no history of that. But also, it had three large communities- they weren't ethnic communities, but they were essentially divided for historical reasons. You couldn't, by looking at them, say who was a Croatian, who was a Serb, who was a Muslim. They were all, ethnically, people who had- [whose families had lived in that country for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, but in different ways, some had adopted Catholicism and mainly had stayed outside the Turkish embrace and had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And the Serbs were- you know the background; I'm not going to give a lecture on the internal nature of Bosnia. But the effect of all that was that the issue that was at stake was whether Bosnia should remain - should become, it never had been - an independent, unitary state, or whether some significant part of it, what became Republika Srpska, should be allowed to unite with Serbia, and whether the Croats should be allowed to with Croatia. And we could see no fundamental either British reason or European reason why this should be seen as- certainly a humanitarian crisis. It was certainly ghastly because of the ethnic cleansing that was primarily Serb, although there were elements of Croatian ethnic cleansing as well. But we could not see a reason why British troops should sensibly be sent as combat forces taking sides in that conflict.

Now, some predicted, wrongly, as it turned out, that if we- if there was not military intervention by NATO or some combat role, then the Bosnian conflict would not just be in Bosnia, it would spread, it would cover the whole of the Balkans, it might include Turkey, and so forth. That was the warnings that some people were giving. I think Paddy Ashdown made speeches of that order, as did various other political people, some in the Labour Party, one or two in the Conservative Party. We always took the view that that was an absurd argument, that there was not the slightest reason to believe that whatever happened to Bosnia, that it was going to become a general Balkans conflagration and certainly not one involving Greece, or Turkey, or countries outside former Yugoslavia. And the way things developed, our view on that was seen to be correct, that it never did seriously risk going in that direction.

And the other big problem we had was a big disagreement with the United States. And there's no doubt that that led to quite fractious language being used, particularly by Americans in Congress, not so much President Clinton, but the Americans in Congress, including Joe Biden, if I'm not mistaken, at that time, who wanted much more what they would call "robust policy," and, in particular, the American view became identified as "lift and strike", to lift the arms embargo that the United Nations and imposed and use NATO air power and bomb the Serbs. And we argued that this was unacceptable, unless you wanted the UN force to be withdrawn entirely from Bosnia. Because we had boots on the ground, as did the French, as did half a dozen other countries, mostly European countries. The Americans had never had a single boot on the ground, nor any intention of making any direct contribution on the ground to the humanitarian effort. And we said: Look, you know, we're not prepared to be on the ground when you're bombing from- or NATO's bombing from the air. That is too dangerous. And I remember, just to conclude this part of our discussion, I remember a meeting I had during that period, as Defense Secretary with President Izetbegović, the Bosnian president, from, also from the Bosnian Muslim background. And he said: Why can we not have- We are an independent country. Why can we not have NATO being invited to defend us from the aggression from Milošević and Tudjman? And I said: Mr. President, there's no reason at all why you can't have that. That's your right as an independent state, if you wish to exercise that right. What you can't have is the United Nations forces in Bosnia, UNPROFOR, remaining while it all happens. If you are

willing to see us leave, as in- this is not speaking as a Brit. But if you want- you're willing to see, and what I was saying was the view of the United Nations themselves, which they made clear, if you want that to happen, sure, we'll all leave. We- you're entitled to tell us to go, and then you can reach whatever accommodation with Washington or NATO that you wish. And he said: I can't do that. And I said: Why not? And he said: Because we recognize that without the UN presence... Your presence protecting the humanitarian convoys, and the various other assistance you've given, is saving tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands of Bosnians, who would either starve or would have not have the medical supplies required because of the war that is going on in this country. And if you're forcing me, I don't like this choice, but if you're forcing me to choose between having a UN presence and not having NATO strikes, or the other way around, then we would rather have the UN continuing to be here. And that's what happened.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: But you say, Sir Malcolm, that it was essentially a civil war. But of course, as you know, a lot of the pressure, say in the media and in Parliament and the like, and you refer to Paddy Ashdown, who was particularly effective in that, comes from drawing these historical analogies, and it's a question- it's a bit like pinning the tail on the donkey. And if you can manage to make a recognizable analogy with the 1930s, then you get your intervention, regardless of the situation. Tony Blair managed to do it in 2003, David Cameron failed to do it in 2013 over Syria. And I remember talking to Horst Teltschik, the German advisor, who told me quite bluntly, in front of an audience, that Croatia was our friend, Germany wanted to help Croatia as a friend, and therefore, we insisted on it being recognized in December 1991. In addition to that, I mean, and I'm thinking here the analogies which are drawn occasionally about the Spanish Civil War and the Democratic Republic not being helped by the British and the French, while the Germans and the Italians set about destroying the Republic. Other people have pointed out, for example, the Russian insistence that the Serb case be heard at the time, so there were other powers really taking an interest, and it didn't spread to other countries, as I've been warned by people like Douglas, but we did have Kosovo in 1999, when Milosević went the next step. And of course, lastly, talking, you know, in those Chequers seminars, you refer to Islamic fundamentalism and the like, the Bosnian government eventually was forced to turn to the likes of Saudi Arabia, and Iran, for arms, aid and volunteers.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Right, let me try and respond to the various points that you raise, and what you've said is all correct, but it's only part of the overall picture. And one has to look at, as we- certainly, as a government, we had to look at the overall picture and come to a judgment as to what was appropriate. First of all, yes, I don't question that various people had their own motives for what they were doing and the German-Croatian relationship was indeed as you described. And one of the reasons for the Bosnian conflict in the first place was a very foolish pressure that the German government insisted on recognition of the independence of Croatia. And if they had not done- the last thing Bosnia wanted to do was declare independence. But they were forced into a situation, once Croatian independence had been recognized, the Bosnians knew that if they did not become independent, they would simply be absorbed into Serbia, which most of them were not prepared to tolerate. So that is indeed a correct description of the background. But to go on from that, and to use the examples you've used, as if somehow they imply that what we did was the mistaken policy... I think we made one mistake. I've given a great deal of thought to this over the years, and I think it was one big mistake, not just Britain, but most of the European countries and other countries made and that was insisting on the continuation of the UN arms embargo. So at a time when the Bosnian Serbs were not affected by the embargo, because they had access to most of the Yugoslav military equipment that had been left in Bosnia after Tito, and they- and, in addition to that, they got all the help they needed from Milošević in terms of equipment. They didn't have the direct involvement of Serbian troops, but they did certainly have a great deal of help in other ways. Likewise, the Croats. So, the only people who suffered as a result of the arms embargo were the Bosnian government and the Bosnian Muslim section of the population. And that I- having said that, there was no way we could

remove the embargo without that being vetoed by the Russians for their own reasons.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I was going to say, the Russians made a big fuss about that. But one of the things they said at the time to the Americans was: Why do you keep raising this 'lift and strike' issue with us when nobody in Europe supports you? Even your own allies?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yeah, well, sure. The answer to that particular point is that Clinton had raised 'lift and strike' not because he actually wanted to, but because of the pressure he was under from Congress. He was constantly being accused of not carrying out his responsibilities. And I remember when he sent Warren Christopher to Chequers, to come and see John Major to try and- as part of a trip to other European countries as well. I was present at that meeting in Chequers. And what was most noticeable was that Warren Christopher, the Secretary of State, made no serious effort to sell 'lift and strike' to us. He was going through the motions of saying: This is what we would like to do. What's your attitude? Oh, that's your attitude. I'll report that back to Washington. You know, there was no attempt to put meaningful pressure on us, or to make it sound as if they had a thought-through strategy and knew what they were wanting to do.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Is because he did not believe in it himself?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I didn't know whether he did or not. I--no, I think if the Europeans had been willing to go along with it, then there was no risk from the United States because this was airstrikes. You know, the Americans believed then, as they believed subsequently, and indeed, Tony Blair did as well, that airpower by itself could control what ultimately happens on the ground. And if we've learned one thing in the last 30 years, it must surely be that while airpower is hugely important in winning a victory, it is not your only game to actually have effective control. If airpower is in combination either with international troops on the ground or local troops of the country concerned, sufficiently powerful to be able to control the country... So, for example, I mean, you have the more recent example of Libya, where NATO airpower undoubtedly helped the people on the ground to get rid of Gaddafi. But as we have seen, the people on the ground weren't themselves sufficiently united or strong to replace it with stable alternatives. On the other hand, you have had situations in places like Iraq or Afghanistan, where the United States in particular has had total air supremacy but has not been able to deliver peace because they were not prepared to do what might have been needed on the ground for a very long number of years. Just one final point, if I may, because I think it's just been mentioned briefly: Kosovo example. Surely in Kosovo, it is sometimes suggested, there was an example of what we should have done, because wasn't Kosovo a great success? Well, I take issue with that. If you look at what actually happened when NATO bombed Kosovo, at the beginning of that exchange, just as it was beginning, NATO's official position was based on two fundamental propositions, both of which have been proved to be utterly wrong. First of all, they said: Don't worry, the bombing will only be for three or four days, and Milošević will give in, and therefore this is not going to be something that is a big, ongoing issue. As we now know, the bombing lasted 68 days, I think it was, and it was only when there was a threat, which was either genuine or not, that it would be combined with ground attack by NATO forces in Kosovo, that Milošević collapsed. But the second fundamental basis on which NATO got it wrong, was NATO said quite explicitly, as did the American and British and other governments at that time, that this was not about- that the bombing of Serbia was not about any support for an independent Kosovo. This was limited to ensuring that the autonomy of Kosovo was reestablished. And there was no support in Washington- well, not no support. This was- the view of the American, British and other NATO governments was not to support the dismemberment. Now, I've got no interest in whether Kosovo should or should not have become independent. I'm simply saying, of course, that turned out to be totally and hopelessly wrong. And I

think there is an argument that when they said it had nothing to do with Kosovo independence, that was a dishonest statement. It wasn't a mistake. It was something they were just not admitting to. Because if they were- if it was honest, then what they failed to realize was that there was no remote reason why the Kosovar Albanians, faced with the one opportunity they had the whole history of Kosovo for several hundred years, with the assistance of NATO to achieve independence, why should they compromise for anything less than independence? That was always predictable. And either the NATO governments were very foolish in not realizing that, or they were dishonest in not admitting it from the start.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: But surely a more pertinent example, I mean, I brought up Kosovo as an example of when people talked in those clichés about appeasers with an appetite growing with eating, that they said if Milošević wasn't stopped in Bosnia, then he would go to Kosovo. In fact, I remember, in '91, a lot of people predicted that Kosovo was going to explode before Bosnia, but isn't a more pertinent example there, I take your point about "lift and strike", and Clinton in particular, used the Bosnian situation to bash Bush in the electoral campaign of 1992 and then absolutely went into reverse gear, and then just let his rhetoric and the Democrats in Congress make a lot of noise about it. Isn't a more pertinent example, though, Operation Storm, the reclamation of the Krajina by the Croats in the summer of 1995, which provided the basis for Dayton. And they kind of lay out politically... an example.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: You had two developments. You had the Croatian success in recapturing the Krajina, which changed the whole military balance in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but you also had the atrocity of the massacre at Srebrenica. And my first responsibility when I became Foreign Secretary, within days, was to chair the London conference about how to respond to what had happened in Srebrenica. And that was all to do with a massacre, not just that it was a massacre, that was terrible enough in itself, but it was in a massacre in what purported to be a safe haven. And, against that background, there was an agreed position amongst all the Western countries - Russia abstained, it wasn't hostile, but it abstained - that the Serbs had to be warned that any further action against any so-called "safe havens" would result in airstrikes of a very, very profound type. And that is what indirectly led to Dayton. But it was at a time when pretty well all the parties were exhausted, Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, and were looking for a way out.

One final point, if I may. When the safe... the whole Srebrenica issue should have been avoided. Because I remember vividly when the idea of safe havens was first being discussed. "Surely, we should create safe havens with UN forces in each of the three or four places that were chosen." The United Nations Secretary General said we, as the UN are concerned, yes, we're very supportive of the idea of safe havens. But they will require substantial additional military troops provided by the various countries that are forming UNPROFOR. And the United Kingdom, and, if I'm not mistaken, France, did agree, we would expand our military contribution, but no other country did. And the Americans certainly made no even remote offer to have a single American involved. And the consequence was that when a decision was taken to establish these safe havens, it was against the background when the troops that would be available to protect them from UN countries was substantially less than the UN had themselves identified as being the minimum required. The United Kingdom... I remember our discussions within government, we said: We don't think it's right to create a safe haven when you haven't got the capability to actually provide, in military terms, the protection that might be needed. We had no support from that point of view. Virtually every other UNPROFOR country, including the French, said: No, no, it's hugely important. We have to make this political. It's a political decision to have safe havens. And so, we were not... we felt, as the sole country that was skeptical, we should not try and veto this, that would not be right. We said: Well, if you want to go ahead, we will not block this. But we are profoundly concerned. And, as we all know, the reason why the Srebrenica massacre was possible was because the Dutch were completely underprovided either with manpower or military equipment to provide the kind of defense that would have been needed to prevent

the Serbs carrying out the atrocities they were responsible for.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I'm going to jump in at this point and ask about Russia, in that connection, actually, well, partly connected to events in Yugoslavia and partly in broader terms. By then, we're talking about '95, relations between Russia and the West were deteriorating. December '94 we have that speech, remember, by Boris Yeltsin, in Budapest, where he said, "Cold peace is coming to Europe", or it might come to Europe, although the Cold War is over, but there might be cold peace. Russia invaded Chechnya [in December 1994. In the- well, or sent military force in, Chechnya was a part of Russia, but also, in Yugoslavia, the Russians were seemingly- or in Bosnia in particular, the Russians were seemingly increasingly frustrated by that sense that they were being ignored by their Western partners, by the British, especially by the Americans. And you could sense that from the Russian memoirs and Russian documents that covered the London conference where I think - Kozyrev and Grachev were both in London at that time, weren't they? From your communications with them, your meetings with them, did you feel that pent-up resentment on the part of the Russians?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I think I go part of the way with what you were saying, Sergey. There is no doubt that the Russians were- it wasn't just that Yeltsin didn't like what was happening. It was that he was under domestic criticism for not himself doing more to prevent it. [So, I think they could have lived fairly easily with Polish and Hungarian and Czech membership of NATO. At that time, that was something that... The Baltic States was a bridge too far. And certainly, the ongoing discussion in some quarters about Georgia and Ukraine... I never supported Georgian or Ukrainian membership of NATO. I always thought it was unrealistic for reasons I can go into, if you want me to. But it was the belief that increasingly substantial parts of the old Soviet Union would not only be independent, but be actually members of NATO, but Russia was left in the cold. And even though they understood why that was probably inevitable, it wasn't very easy for them to absorb. However, the real point I want to make is that although you're right to say there was frustration and annoyance and resentment, I don't myself believe that the issue came to a head until Kosovo because that was, as it were, NATO going to war in Europe over an issue where the Russians took an exactly opposite perspective, and it is significant that Putin's first major statement on attacking the West, when he addressed the Munich conference, that, if I'm not mistaken, was roundabout 2005, 2006, something of that order?

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: 2007, yeah?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: 2007. Right, thank you. Well, that's already 15 years later than the 1992 discussions when I became Defense Secretary. That's 15 years during that whole period, including the first five years of Putin's presidency. I'm not saying he supported it or was enthusiastic. But it wasn't a big deal, in the sense that it became a very big deal. [60:00] So, if that was the single most important reason why today, Russia's relationship with the West is so bad, then that should have exploded in the 1990s. And it should not have required a speech in Munich in 2007, which is often seen as Putin's own personal alienation from any-

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: One could argue, though, with Kozyrev being basically ousted, Primakov coming to power, that there was some sort of- already some kind of a turn. I mean, Primakov is generally associated with more.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yes.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Yeah, with the tougher policy. What's your recollection of your dealings with him?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I had one or two meetings with Primakov. I was still Foreign Secretary when you- when he became Foreign Minister. I started off with Kozyrev and then Primakov took over, and Primakov, of course, was a man of enormous experience, a very able guy, particularly in relation to the Middle East and that part of the world. And I cannot immediately recall the detail of the discussions we had. But I certainly do not recall ever being subject to severe attack for what NATO was doing in regard to either the enlargement of NATO or issues of that kind.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I found one interesting document that I just wanted- I think- I don't know if I'd be able to pull it up right away. But I want to say this was a meeting. It was a comment that you made after meeting with Primakov at some point in which- oh, there we go. This is April...this must be April 1996, I believe. Yeah, April 1996. So after meeting Primakov, you say here, you wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in which you said that "the Russians have repeatedly told us that their principal concern is NATO enlargement, and have recently said plainly that they are not troubled by EU enlargement. Primakov made this clear to me in Strasbourg at the end of last month." And when I read that, I thought I thought actually it was kind of interesting. It is interesting that the Russians are, you know, emphasizing NATO, but are actually saying, well, EU enlargement, that's all fine. I mean, what's your-

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I'm not wanting to suggest for a moment that Primakov was relaxed about NATO enlargement, nor was Yeltsin. They were both upset by it, wished it wasn't happening, but they had even bigger fish to fry. They were not going to allow the relationship with the West to collapse. Because we had this very strong difference with them on NATO enlargement, to some extent they found it felt it was inevitable. They didn't like it. They could see the pressure that NATO itself was under from the Baltic states and had been under from Poland and Hungary. And they realized that in political terms, even if NATO had wanted to say no, certainly to Poland and Hungary, and the Czech Republic, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to do so. And Václav Havel in the Czech Republic, the Solidarity Movement in Poland - there was a lot of admiration for what they had achieved. And because they wanted to see this established in Western institutions, that is a separate matter.

The distinction between European Union enlargement and NATO enlargement is in a sense very- it's not difficult to understand. The EU is not a military organization. It's an economic organization, primarily, a trade organization primarily, and for... Russians did not see that with the same...they were not under the same domestic Russian pressure. I think that's an important point because the Russian military were not as powerful as they had been in the past, but they still have to be taken account of. I remember when I went to Moscow, I think as Defense Secretary, being invited as part of my program, with the agreement of the Russian government, I was invited to address 60 Russian generals - I think they were all generals - in a hall in Moscow. And I've never had such a miserable experience in my life! It was quite obvious none of them had volunteered to come to hear themselves being lectured by a NATO Defense Minister, and none of them were remotely enthusiastic about what they saw happening. And when I finished my own speech and invited questions, I think there was one polite question, and then some total silence. You know, it was all something which would not have happened if I'd been at the University of Moscow instead.

So, the Russian government was pursuing a policy which their own armed forces were very unhappy about. I remember being taken to a- I can't remember where it was, but it was some town about a couple hundred miles from Moscow, where they had a major defense establishment. And the people who were showing me around, who had clearly been told to do this, were showing me some of their most- their newest military equipment, some of which had never been admitted to or published before, and offering to share it with us and sell it to us if we would like to buy some of it and so forth, you know, conversations that would have been inconceivable a few years earlier. Now, these were the people I was meeting. I don't think it necessarily

reflected the view of the Russian General Staff at that particular moment in time, to put it mildly.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Yeah, it's fascinating. I've been reading but one thing that struck me, frankly, about reading on Russia [during that period, is just how anxiously people like Kozyrev and Yeltsin wanted to be part of NATO. But then when you get to the military establishment, you sort of have to wonder, I mean, did they- did the military also feel this way? It's a little bit hard to imagine. But I found something- one of the things that I think you said in one of the meetings that struck me, actually, when you talk about the- "it's probably not a good idea for Russia to be- to join, or it will never join NATO." One thing that you said, that if Russia did join NATO, then NATO's borders would exclude, or would extend all the way to China. And what would happen then, in the case of Russia-Chinese problems, et cetera?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yeah, it was a major example of something that is also relevant to the debate about Ukraine and Georgia. If you're a member of NATO, and you have the benefit of Article Five, then if you are attacked by an external force, you are entitled to call upon the solidarity and practical support of all the other members of NATO. And so that is an argument that persuaded me that Georgia and Ukraine should not be accepted. Because it was always obvious that if Russia was aggressive against Georgia, as it has been, or against Ukraine, as it has been, there would never be any question of the United States, Britain, France, and Germany going to war with Russia to reverse that. And if you could not actually contemplate that, you shouldn't accept countries as members because you would not only be creating total illusion in those countries if they were subject to aggression, but you would then be also destroying the credibility of your own alliance, if you had not come to the defense of a country that had been attacked. Now, all these arguments were true in the case of Georgia and Ukraine. They were true with knobs on when it came to Russia itself. The point about the border they shared with China, and the fact that in 1962, I think it was, they had already had a border conflict with China which involved military clashes.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: They had a prolonged conflict in the '60s, at which point the Chinese actually were trying to get the British to - and other Europeans - to be more anti-Soviet. Edward Heath came to China at one point and Mao Zedong was telling him, you know, you're not- you're selling out, that there's another Munich going on here.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: That's one way of describing it. I'm not sure that Heath would have put it that way.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Actually, speaking of which, on China, since we touched on China, you mentioned in your memoirs your discussion with the Chinese, including, I think, Qian Qichen and then Jiang Zemin and Li Peng and others. And you mentioned that the Chinese were giving certain promises with regard to Hong Kong. In retrospect, looking over, you know, even what happened in the last couple of years, do you think the Chinese were at the time breaking their promises? Do you think they intended to break their promises?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, I was Foreign Secretary until '97. And it was literally days after I ceased being Foreign Secretary that Hong Kong returned to mainland China. So that technically happened under Blair's government, but it was literally a few days afterwards. So, none of the questions of disillusion with China existed during my own term. But I think if you wanted me to sum up my feelings on this, I think, broadly speaking, the Chinese... I mean, even today as we speak, Hong Kong is incredibly different to the rest of China in terms of the day-to-day freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, their access to the Internet, independence of their courts, their ability to come and go to the rest of the world as they wish to- all the obvious things

remain true. But what we have seen for several years now - it started before Xi Jinping, but it has accelerated, it has accelerated very much since Xi Jinping - is salami tactics of seeking to erode the autonomy of Hong Kong, not because the Chinese want to destroy two systems in one country, they want to retain the facade of two systems, as long as that does not permit the people of Hong Kong either to exercise political hostility to China or to celebrate- to have demonstrations commemorating Tiananmen Square or in other ways questioning the legitimacy of the Chinese communist system.

So, what they're doing at the moment is tearing the guts out of two systems by ending, effectively, the rule of law, because what we're told is that this new national security law, passed in Beijing, which the people of Hong Kong have not yet actually seen, even LEGCO, apart from Carrie Lam, have not been shown this bill - that is actually going to become a law before they see it. We are told that part of its provisions will be to have Carrie Lam appoint the judges who would preside over any legal appeals against the implementation of the national security law. Now, that by itself destroys the rule of law, because if you're not prepared to allow the existing courts, which have carried out that function since 1997, and are having your own tame chief executive deciding who the judges will be, we know that the cases will be heard in exactly the same way as they would be heard in Beijing, which means not the slightest prospect of the Chinese government having to change course.

I had a- I think you and I, Sergey, had this discussion, but your colleagues may not be familiar with it. When I went to Beijing to see Qian Qichen, when I was Foreign Secretary in the final stages of the period before the handover, I went through Hong Kong. And the people in Hong Kong said: When you see the Chinese Foreign Minister, please tell him that from our point of view, what's as important as whether we have more than one candidate to vote for in the elections in Hong Kong is whether we continue to enjoy the rule of law when we become part of China. So, I promised I would raise that and when I saw Qian Qichen. I made this point to him. And I've never forgotten his answer through the interpreter. He said, "Don't worry, Mr. Rifkind. We in China, we too believe in the rule of law in China, that people must obey the law." And I said to him, "but hold on a moment, when we talk about the rule of law, when Hong Kong talks about the rule of law, it's not just the people who must obey the law, it's the government must be under the law, under independent judges, and if they are found to be in breach of the law, the government must take account of that." He not only didn't agree with me, he hadn't the faintest idea what I was talking about. It was... a system where judges would be superior to the government. And the circumstances in China I think have been summed up beautifully as being ruled by law, as opposed to rule of law. And it seems true in Putin's Russia. You use the law to criminalize your opponents, so that if they, in a democratic and peaceful way, seek to undermine your power, you can accuse them of breaking the law, which typically they are under their system, and therefore can be locked up or in other ways persecuted. So that's essentially what Hong Kong is terrified of experiencing, and will experience, if these proposals ever are implemented, which seems highly likely.

DR. HELEN PARR: It's interesting.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Before we finish, I have one particular request of you. In the list of questions you sent to me, you mentioned something that David Owen wrote in the Balkan Odyssey, his book, which I'm afraid I've never read, but you say that he described me as, quote, "the most effective senior policymaker, in terms of getting my own way." Now, I was never aware that he'd made that remark. If you could, Sergey, tell me the quotation.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: That's part of-

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I'm sorry?

DR. GERALD HUGHES: What he talks about is, as the negotiations go on, as they

move towards the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, he singled you out as being particularly good at, shall we say, ensuring that meetings had the right outcome.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Okay, well, I mean, you know-

DR. GERALD HUGHES: I'll bring out the quote and I'll send it to you.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: If you could send me the page of the book, or whatever it is, a copy of it, I would be most grateful because David's- I don't know David that well, but I've had various conversations with him. He's never made that particular point, so I'm just intrigued to see what he says.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: I've got the quote for you here. "Malcolm Rifkind, the Defense Secretary, intelligent and sharp, was totally opposed to any imposition of a settlement and managed rather effectively to lampoon my proposal for using airpower."

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Ah, right. Could you send me a photocopy of that, if you would? Well, it was about the airpower, about using airpower. Yeah. I mean, it was basically the argument that I think we mentioned earlier, that you can't have UN forces being at the other end of NATO bombs. And it's all very well for the Americans, who didn't have a single guy on the ground, being willing to take that risk, but we weren't, so I think that would have been the point, but I'd have to check.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: The argument made by a lot of the advocates of airstrikes was that the British and French forces effectively became hostages to prevent a larger military intervention. And indeed, later in the in the war, we actually saw them taking hostages of Western troops.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yes, because a lot of-

DR. GERALD HUGHES: So it was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: But, I'm sorry, I would argue that that gave strength to our argument, not weakened our argument. I mean, the reason... And you're quite correct, historically it's indeed the case, because the Serbs were concerned about NATO airpower. They couldn't give a damn about the humanitarian convoys being discontinued; in fact, that would have worked to their advantage because it would have forced Izetbegović to surrender or make concessions. And what- so the question was, how could they prevent Americans using airstrikes and taking hostages was an obvious issue they resorted to. So that- the hostages would never have been contemplated in the first place, but for the fear of unilateral American use of air power.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: Well, do you remember the alleged attack on this parliament in Pale by an unmarked aircraft, which dropped a thousand-ton bomb.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I remember it happening, but I don't remember the detail. I can't recollect any of the detail.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: Supposedly It was a kind of Algerian War-style covert op by the French.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Oh, okay.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: That was the story put out at the time.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Yeah, I don't have any personal recollection of it, I'm afraid, so I can't help on that one. I mean, I vaguely remember it happening. The French, being the French, would quite often be loyal allies, which they were on UNPROFOR. We worked extremely well. British-French cooperation of a practical, day-to-day kind with the military of both countries worked superbly, but the French government politically also gave more support to the need for "something must be done" kind of argument. Never quite thought what that something was. We tended to be unashamedly pragmatic. They liked to be both politically interventionist, but without risking their military.

DR. GERALD HUGHES: And then what did you think when the Prime Minister of Luxembourg said, "The hour of Europe has arrived"? What did you think of that?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: The less I say about Mr. Poos, the better. No, it was ridiculous, because it was a marvelous example of Luxembourg rhetoric, from a country whose military contribution to NATO was not as significant as those of others, to put it mildly. I remember once during the debates, at the time, this is before the end of the Cold War, when I was Minister of State at the Foreign Office, I was with a German general, at a time when NATO... when Germany, then, as now, was being asked to make a bigger contribution to NATO's military capability. And I've never forgotten this general who said to me, he said: Mr. Rifkind, you have to realize that we in Germany have a very difficult problem. We are expected to have military forces in NATO that are strong enough to help deter the Soviet Union without upsetting Luxembourg. That's Germany's predicament over the years.

DR. HELEN PARR: It's been very interesting, and just by way of some concluding thoughts: When you look back now as to how world politics, and Britain's role within world politics, looked from that mid- to late-1990s perspective, as you were kind of surveying how things were changing and what Britain could and couldn't do about it. What do you think you would- what would you say that that you got right in your sort of anticipation of the way that events would move? And, or, were there things that you missed or didn't get right-

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Sure.

DR. HELEN PARR: -in the way that you expected events to move forward?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: I think what we, one of the things we got right, not just ourselves, but we were one of the countries that got it right, was that we were never seduced by the "end of history" argument. That we knew that what had happened in 1989 was fantastic. It was the best of times in a very real sense: the end of the Cold War, peacefully; the end of Soviet threat to Western Europe, militarily; the end of communism as an ideology; the growth of democracy - these were all extraordinary historic achievements, which shouldn't be diminished. But we also, in a rather boring way, [I think were aware earlier than the Americans were aware that as one door closes, and another slams in your face, that what you were beginning to see from a very early stage was the reemergence in Eastern Europe and in the old Soviet Union of nationalism, of local, not just Soviet nationalism or Russian nationalism, but the nationalism of very small, relatively small groups. Particularly what happened in Yugoslavia, but also Chechnya, but also what happened in the Caucasus and elsewhere. And that should have been predicted and should have been part of the balance of what was required. So, I think we got it more right than the Americans did on that particular front.

But I think also - what we got wrong - it goes back a little bit to what we said earlier.

Well, there are two things. One, on Bosnia, I mentioned earlier about the arms embargo. I think that was a serious mistake. It may not have been easy to have done anything else, but we should at least have tried. But I think also we should have been more imaginative about offering solutions to the Russians on the NATO question. Though, in practice, we were, you know, the furthest we ever got was the NATO-Russia Council, which... whereas in the late 1990s, when it was still Yeltsin, still Kozyrev, they could have been tempted with something, at least on the face of it looked as if we were treating them more seriously and more as an equal. And I think finally what we got wrong, and it comes goes back to the Kosovo conflict in my personal view, is I... Kosovo was never... what happened in Kosovo was never geopolitically important to the West, the United States or to the United Kingdom, or any other Western country. Some argue that it was an ethical obligation. I think, actually, I would put it - you may think I'm being cynical, but I think the road to Baghdad began in Belgrade. That Blair's enthusiasm and the American enthusiasm for using military superiority as a way of achieving political results was tested in Kosovo. They believe, I don't, but they believe it was successful. And I think it was that perceived success that led pretty directly to the belief that something similar could be resolved, could be dealt with in Iraq, that militarily we were going to get rid of Saddam Hussein very easily and then we would have a democratic system of government somehow emerging in Iraq. And I think the naivety of that view, and not just looking at this in retrospect, I can claim my speeches and articles at the time said as much, was, I think... the naivety of believing that airpower by itself could deliver permanent political change on the ground was always flawed. And it took Iraq, sadly, for that, ultimately, to be established. And I think if it hadn't been for Kosovo, I don't think- It's not certain, but it's a lot less likely - that Iraq would ever have happened.

DR. HELEN PARR: Thank you for that response, and just in a sort of, perhaps a narrower domestic political sense, going back to the question of European integration, you know, at the time you were rebuked in the French press for your "moderate Euroskepticism." But, in retrospect, this looks like the, you know, the period of the high peak of conservative pro-Europeanism. It's obviously a period in which, you know, the transatlantic relationship and Britain's membership of the EU was at the center of thinking about Britain's foreign policy, so-

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Let me say, being described by Le Monde as a "Euroskeptique modéré," as far as I was concerned, it was- I took it exactly as Margaret Thatcher took being described as the Iron Lady by the Red Army's military journal. It wasn't meant to be a compliment, but as far as I was concerned, being a Euroskeptique modéré was exactly how I saw myself. I was pragmatic, I was in favor of our membership- genuinely in favor of our membership of the European Union and remained in favor; I voted to remain in the referendum. But I- it was a different European Union to the one that Mr. Mitterrand or Helmut Kohl had in mind. And that's what... in one sense, my views were no different to the views of a large majority of people in the United Kingdom at that time, and many still.

DR. HELEN PARR: Would you have any advice for your successors today as we reach this historic juncture in Britain's relations with the EU?

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, I... yeah, I mean, but I'm not sure if it's advice, but I certainly make an observation. I mean, what is, I think, hugely significant since we left the European Union is that on aspects of foreign policy, on all the issues, and it's been made mainly during Trump's presidency- well, it has been during Trump's presidency, on all the issues in which Trump has alienated Paris and Berlin, he has also alienated London. Whether it is climate change, or global trade and WTO, whether it's the Iran nuclear deal, whether it's the recognition- moving our embassies in Jerusalem, and a half a dozen other issues of that kind, it is very interesting that the United Kingdom, including Boris Johnson, and hardline Brexiteers, have sided - or, not "sided", that's the wrong way of putting it - have come to the same view on what the policy ought to be on these matters as have their colleagues in Paris and Berlin.

We've not been part of the European Union deliberations on these issues now, since 2016. And so we've done it, we've reached these conclusions because Britain, at the end of the day, is not in the EU, but it's a European country. And its judgment of our geopolitical interests are not unchanged, in the sense that -

Britain and France and Germany - you cannot conceive of any serious threat to the security of any one of those three, that would not also be a threat to the other two. And it's no coincidence that Britain and France, as we speak, have a closer defense relationship. And indeed, even a closer relationship on nuclear weapons issues, as we are the two European countries that are nuclear weapon states. Far from that relationship having been damaged by our departure from the EU, it has had no effect at all. And if Trump, God forbid, was elected to a second term, and if he was successful, which he wouldn't be, but if he was hypothetically successful in withdrawing the United States from NATO, or removing the nuclear umbrella that America has given to Europe, then it's not just France, it's France and the United Kingdom who, in some way that has never been necessary up till now, would work closely together with Germany and other non-nuclear-weapon states to ensure Europe has some degree of nuclear weapon protection from any attempt to nuclear blackmail by Mr. Putin or anyone like Mr. Putin on other issues. So, these issues haven't changed, whether we're in the EU or not. And I think our current foreign policy tends to prove that. I mean, people have totally misunderstood Boris Johnson and his relationship with Trump. It's been argued because they're both populists, because they both have a shock of unruly white hair, and because of other characteristics, that, somehow, they agree with each other on policy. They don't at all. Johnson, I've known him for 30 years. I don't know him that well. But he's been essentially liberal with a small l on social issues and on internationalism, and still is as Prime Minister. So, you know, that says something about our likely foreign policy. If that's true under a Johnson government, it's unlikely to change, either under Kier Starmer or any successor conservative.

DR. HELEN PARR: Thank you.

DR. SERGEY RADCHENKO: Malcolm, always wonderful to speak to you. Thank you so much for sharing your recollections for this deep dive into the 1990s.

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND: Well, thank you very much. It's been a very stimulating exchange for me as well. And I'm grateful for the opportunity to assist you. If I can help in the future, don't hesitate to approach me.